

## **Activity: A Look at the Land**

### **Overview:**

Students trace the path of a small plane crossing Iowa as they listen to an essay written by the pilot. They discuss the author's description of the Iowa landscape and then describe their perception of Iowa's landscape.

### **Associated Objectives:**

- ☐ Students will be introduced to different types of values associated with natural resources.
- ☐ Students will become familiar with navigational tools (map and compass) and demonstrate their ability to use them to navigate successfully.

### **Time:**

30 – 60 minutes

### **Materials:**

Writing materials, Iowa transportation (road) maps, copies of the essay, "A Look at the Land"

### **Directions:**

Hand out copies of Iowa transportation maps or use a large wall map. Have students work in pairs or groups of three. Locate Woodbine. Show students where the plane starts and try to follow along as the teacher reads the text. Or using a large map in the classroom point out to students where they are as the teacher or a student reads the text. Ask the students some questions:

1. In what ways did the author show that Iowa is "blunt as a workbook" and "fine-textured as Japanese paper?"
2. What did the author mean when he said Iowa is "land"?

Have students close their eyes and think about a car drive they took to somewhere in Iowa, or even walking to school. Ask students to describe on a piece of paper their view of Iowa's land from their experiences.

### **Evaluation:**

Students should be able to successfully locate the landmarks, towns, and rivers mentioned in the essay on an Iowa map. Students should relate their perspective of the Iowa landscape based on personal experience.

### **Extensions:**

Have students relate their perception of natural areas in Iowa as a lead into the activity, "Iowa's Natural Areas." (See the "Iowa Habitats" section of the *Background Information* for an overview of natural habitats found in Iowa.)

Construct a replica of a nearby natural area with unique features (e.g., loess hills, natural lakes, rivers, forest). Students can research the area and share their findings.

## Essay: A Look at the Land

Perhaps more than any other state, Iowa is land; great, rolling reaches of it, blunt as a workbook, fine-textured as Japanese paper. Georgia has its piedmont, Arizona its rock desert, but Iowa has – Iowa is – *land*. Everything that grows on it gratefully pushes roots into its dark soil; everything that humans build on it casts small shadows across its great presence. Land is to Iowa as water is to the sea, the one essential thing.

I crossed Iowa by small plane recently, from the southwest corner to northeast corner; Lincoln, Nebraska, to La Crosse, Wisconsin. I flew low, about 3,000 feet above the soil, because I wanted to see this wide state pass close beneath. On a warm day from so low you can sometimes *smell* the earth. But on this June day it had rained; the fields were quiet, and I suspected the cafes full of farmers on short furlough. Woodbine to Auburn, Badger to Clear Lake, Orchard to Lime Springs, I had the privilege of a rare diagonal, an angled route across the grain of Iowa's window-screen grid of section-line roads.

First were the arrow-point Loess Hills that rose from the broad Missouri floodplain; the hills expanded outward to become the sides of a close valley: the Boyer River valley, thinly wooded as if trees had only recently found it. Then the river faded into the uplands, the broad turtle-back of the Des Moines Lobe, where melting ice [glaciers] left broad lands that cried out for twelve-row corn planters.

After a stop in Clear Lake for fuel, I watched those long, straight rivers – The Shell Rock, the Cedar, the Wapsipinicon – bear off to the southeast, like arrows in a quiver, pointing toward the great river out of sight past the Earth's curve. Mile by mile I watched corn and roads, corn and farmsteads, corn and soybeans, towns and land pass beneath. I looked for the ragged little square of Hayden Prairie near Lime Springs, but missed it in the expanse.

There is nothing bold about Iowa's land – except its extent. Its charms are quiet ones, requiring much of the observer. You must look with an eye for the gentle horizon line, the subtle shadings of soil, the exclamation points of trees and distant grain elevators. Iowa is the land, and it is enough.

*Drake Hokanson, from "Iowa – Portrait of the Land," Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Des Moines, 2000*